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## Remembering September 11, 2001: Tips for Youth

The 10th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks is an important event for the United States. Ten years seems like a long time, but people will feel a range of emotions as they reflect on that day and some of the difficult challenges the country has faced since then. Many people will focus on honoring those who died and highlighting the positive aspects to the country's response since the attacks. Some people who were personally affected by the attacks may feel renewed grief or loss. Other people may be stressed or anxious because of other things going on in life right now. Sometimes anniversaries of tragedies can make these feelings stronger.

What is important is to focus on the thoughts, activities, and people that help us feel secure, capable, and optimistic about life in the long run.

- **Don't be surprised if you react differently than you expected.** Most reactions are normal and depend on personal circumstance. Many of us won't be affected very much while others may feel sad, angry, or worried. It may be hard to concentrate in school or sleep at night. Most reactions are temporary, but it is better to be aware of them than to pretend they don't exist.
- **Talk to your friends, family, or teachers.** Often, the best way to feel better or think more clearly about something is to share your feelings with other people. You realize you are not alone and you can help each other. It is important that somebody knows how you feel. Also, pay attention to the reactions of your friends. Tell an adult if you are concerned about a friend who seems unusually distressed. *Identify at least one adult whom you trust to talk to when you are upset.*
- **Try different ways to express yourself.** Talking with others helps, but you also may feel like writing in a journal or doing a creative writing, music, or art project. Just doing the activity is often enough to make you feel better, but it also may help to share your work with others.
- **Avoid too much screen time.** The media is likely to dramatize the anniversary. You or your friends or siblings might be seeing images of the attacks for the first time. Watching endless replays of the attacks or stories about war or the economy can raise anxiety levels. The same is true for constant Internet surfing and negative social networking sites. If you do watch memorial coverage, talk about what you think and feel with your parents or other adults. Be mindful of your younger siblings who may not be able to distinguish between images on TV and their personal reality.
- **Maintain your normal routine and be constructive.** Focus on being back at school. Concentrate on getting organized, doing homework again, participating in extracurricular activities, and catching up with and/or making new friends. Sometimes simply helping out around the house, going to a practice, engaging in a hobby, going to the movies, or reading a favorite book can help make you feel more in control and positive.

- **Stay connected.** Social competency is also important. Having friends and staying connected to friends and loved ones can increase resilience. Being part of positive group experiences and belief systems, such as after school clubs, faith-based communities, and volunteer organizations, can contribute to a sense of connectedness as well.
- **Recognize your strengths.** Identify your own competencies in terms of your daily life and in difficult times. Think about what you have done in the past that helped you when you were anxious or upset. Identify examples of positive things Americans are doing to help others.
- **Get involved.** Contributing to the community or country helps us feel more in control and builds sense of connection and resilience. You can help families in your community who have a parent deployed and may need babysitting, errands run, or yard work; write letters or send care packages to our troops; tutor students who need extra help; or volunteer to help communities affected by natural disasters. Even small acts make a difference!
- **Take care of yourself.** Be sure to get plenty of healthy food, exercise, and sleep. Limit your caffeine and junk food. Listen to relaxing or favorite music. Go for a walk with a friend instead of just chatting online. Above all, don't use drugs or alcohol. While they may **temporarily** mask unpleasant reactions, in the long run they **always** make problems worse.
- **Keep current events in perspective.** People frequently say that "9/11 changed everything," but it is important to remember that change, both gradual and turbulent, is part of human history. The United States and other countries in the world have weathered many crises, including terrorism, disease, natural disasters, and war and, for the most part, have emerged stronger and more resilient each time.
- **Do not ridicule people or ideas just because they are different.** The issues of war, fighting terrorism, and even the economy are complicated and many viewpoints have valid arguments. For instance, people can have supported the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and also care about protecting innocent lives, just as people can oppose war and care deeply about the United States and the safety of our troops. Discussing different views is one of the best ways to broaden and clarify our own beliefs and understanding of the world. **Never tease or threaten someone because they are different from you (or for any reason)!**
- **Differentiate between fact and opinion.** They are not the same. Fact is what actually happens. Opinions are how we feel about what happens. Our opinions should be based on fact, not rumor or supposition. Everyone has a right to his or her own opinion and the ability to express it reflects our most important right: freedom of thought and speech.
- **Explore and express opinions respectfully.** You can discuss ideas without attacking others. Avoid stigmatizing statements like, "Liberals are wimps," or "People who believe in war are jerks." Try stating your thoughts with opening phrases like, "I believe ..." or "Have you thought about ..." instead of "Anybody who ..." or "No one should...."
- **Don't worry if adults seem affected by the anniversary.** Your parents, teachers, and coaches are people, too. It is okay for them to remember how they felt that day, even if it makes them sad. Like you, adults need to be able to express their emotions in an appropriate way. Doing so does not mean there is something wrong with them or with the world.